



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

Office of the Secretary

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UNITED STATES IMPOSES IMMEDIATE BAN ON ELEPHANT IVORY IMPORTS

Secretary of the Interior Manuel Lujan today announced that his Department will move immediately to fully implement the President's decision to impose a total ban on commercial importation of African elephant ivory into the United States.

"This Administration is committed to doing all we can to stop the massive poaching of African elephants," Lujan said. "We believe the current international system for controlling ivory trade has failed to protect the elephant, and we have no choice but to halt commercial ivory shipments into the United States. Although this action alone will not stop international trade in African elephant ivory, it is my hope that other countries will share our outrage and follow our lead in this very critical matter."

The import ban will take effect immediately upon notice in the Federal Register this week. It will remain in effect until the issue of African elephant ivory trade can be discussed at an October meeting of the member nations under the Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species (CITES) in Geneva, Switzerland, and the international community adopts the necessary measures to ensure the illegal poaching of African elephants and commercial trade in elephant ivory is halted.

Lujan said the United States is imposing the moratorium on ivory imports before the CITES meeting because a newly completed Interior Department review of international elephant conservation and trade programs has determined there is no way to distinguish legal from illegal ivory in trade. In addition, the review indicates that elephant populations cannot sustain current poaching levels, and these levels may increase before the CITES meeting when the parties will consider a ban on all commercial ivory trade. The ban is intended to reduce demand for African elephant ivory between now and the October CITES meeting.

Lujan announced May 9 that the United States will support an international ban on commercial ivory trade at this CITES meeting. An international ban would require a two-thirds vote of the 102 member nations.

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More than 80 percent of the commercial ivory trade is believed to be occurring outside the current CITES ivory control system.

Lujan took today's action under the authority of The African Elephant Conservation Act of 1988 and the Endangered Species Act. The ban is directed at commercial trade and will not extend to legally taken sport-hunted trophies imported into the United States from countries which have CITES ivory export quotas.

Lujan said the Department of the Interior is extending the import ban on specific countries and working with the Departments of Commerce and State to seek international cooperation in an effort to protect the species.

In making this announcement today, Secretary Lujan said that he had spoken with the Attorney General and had been assured that the Department of Justice would make enforcement of the moratorium on ivory imports a top priority for the Department.

Attorney General Dick Thornburgh said, "Attempts to evade the import moratorium will be met with a strong enforcement response. It is my hope that this ban on commercial imports will help remove the motivation for the indiscriminate poaching of elephants now occurring in Africa."

Under the African Elephant Conservation Act, it is unlawful for any person to import raw or worked ivory from any country in which a moratorium is in effect. Anyone who knowingly violates this provision is subject to 1-year imprisonment and/or a fine of \$100,000.

The United States imports about 10-12 percent of the annual exports of ivory from Africa. Most commercial U.S. ivory imports come from Hong Kong, the major world ivory dealer and carver. Japan is the major world consumer of ivory.

Current estimates indicate that the population of the African elephant has fallen dramatically in recent years--from 1.5 million in 1978 to between 400,000 and 700,000 currently. Poaching to supply a vast illegal ivory trade is the primary cause for this precipitous decline.